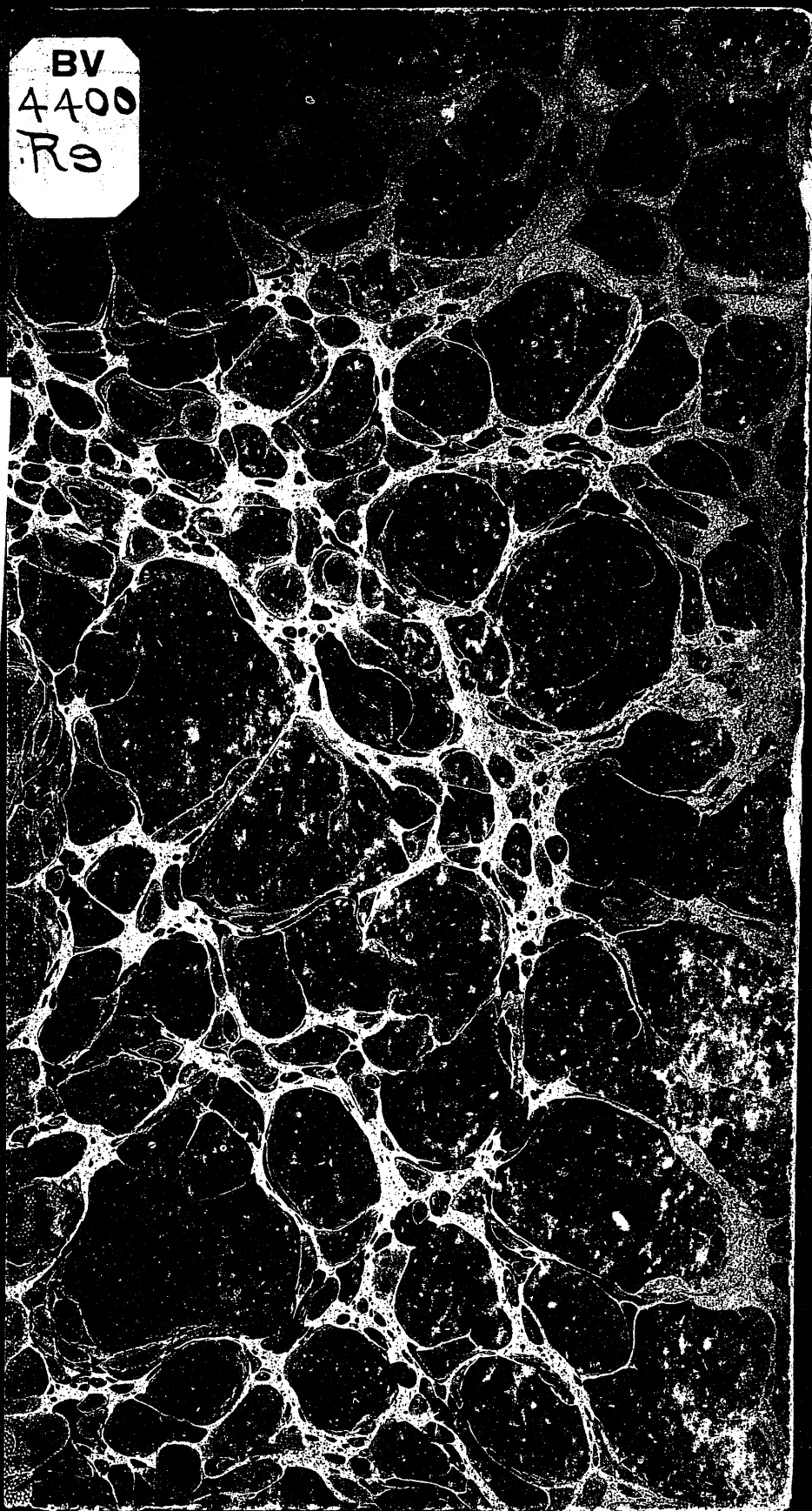
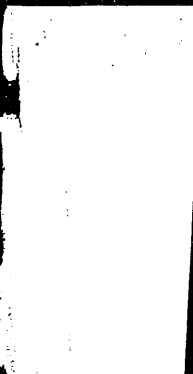


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A METHOD OF CHRISTIAN CO-OPERATION
FOR REACHING THE NON-CHURCH-
GOING CLASS

PREPARED BY

REV. FRANK RUSSELL, D.D.
OSWEGO, N. Y.

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THE
EVANGELICAL
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FOR THE
PROPAGATION OF THE
GOSPEL

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NOTE.—The Churches of Mansfield, O., several years ago, and more recently those of Oswego, N. Y., carried into successful operation a method of co-operation equally adapted to other communities. Dr. Russell, who as a pastor was identified with the origin of the work in both places, has kindly prepared at the request of the Evangelical Alliance the following suggestions for the organization of local Alliances.

EVANGELICAL ALLIANCE OF LOCAL CHURCHES.

I.—SOME EXISTING CONDITIONS.

There is reason to believe that more than one-half of the population never attend any church, and that regular attendants are much less than one-half.

In our cities there are but few who own homes. A very large class move every year or oftener. They do not take root ecclesiastically or socially before they move again. Hence many families fall away from the church, and there are not a few, with unused church letters, prevented from forming church relations by their feeling of instability. Inquiry showed that of a certain district in one city forty per cent. of the non-churchgoers were members of churches elsewhere.

In the country many are far removed from church services and too indifferent to make the necessary effort to attend. Careful examination of forty-four representative towns in Vermont recently showed that of those living two miles or more from church two-thirds never attend.

The foreign element multiplies the number of non-churchgoers; many foreigners being not simply indifferent but positively hostile to the churches.

The church membership as a whole feels no responsibility for the existing condition of things. The minister is expected to do the aggressive Christian work of the church. When the spiritual life of the church is revived, there is for a time a lay activity which is fruitful of good results, but exceptional efforts are soon discontinued and the churchless multitude are left to themselves.

The churches have no mutual understanding. Each claims to oc-

cupy the whole field, while there are scores and hundreds of houses to which the gospel is never carried. There is no intelligent co-operation, without which there can be no comprehensive and well-sustained effort to carry the gospel to the entire community. Meanwhile, notwithstanding all the growth of the churches, the number of the unsaved is constantly and rapidly increasing.

II.—SOME PRINCIPLES.

The consideration of the following propositions has done much toward organizing the alliance of church members for local Christian work.

1st. *The very genius of the gospel* certainly contemplates that the churches shall be in earnest. The fields everywhere whiten for the harvest. "Why stand ye all the day idle?" He who has heard the call must himself say, "Come!" He must go into the very streets and lanes and persuade their inhabitants to come in.

2d. *The membership of the churches must rally* to this activity. They must do this because individual growth depends upon it, because the waving fields demand it, because the upbuilding of the church demands it. The membership of the churches must not relegate its appropriate gospel work to the lodges, reform societies, guilds, or any other associations. The churches must accept the responsibility of their own legitimate work.

3d. Neither can the churches clustered together in any given community do the work *separately*. No church can do its own work well unless it is also assisting the work of the other churches. The powers of evil easily unite; the churches, also, must unite in co-operation against the powers of evil. Nothing will so secure and maintain complete harmony, and show forth the strength of it, as associated Christian work. This is commonly seen to be the very force that brings precious results in revivals. The spectacle of such union in the community carries great power with it. "That they all may be one, that the world may believe that thou hast sent me." New locations for the organization of Sunday-schools, missions, and churches will be better secured, and confirmed in the respective denominations, if the activity which has led to them is a true union of gospel forces.

4th. The crowning point is *individual effort*. The power of preaching is largely lost in generalities; when personal persuasions follow it there is a revival. We count swarms of men everywhere

seeking personal conference with people to sell them goods. The work of the gospel must also be hand to hand. The work must be done by the individual with the individual. In political contests the primary organizations poll every voter, learn the preference of each, and are able to give the entire list of doubtful ones. Personal effort in Christian work is equally effective and certainly more important.

5th. The work must be done *thoroughly*. It is not enough that we have churches, complete in their equipment; we must go out into the streets and lanes to bring in the people who now remain away. They must every one of them be found. They must feel the pulsation of the church life in their homes and through actual acquaintance.

6th. The work must be *perpetual*. If there is reason why it should be done during any month of the year, the same reason holds good for every month of the year. If there is any reason why the evangelizing work should be started, the same reason holds for its continuance. It is right to commence a thorough gospel work. It is right to improve on the same by wise changes, from time to time, but it is a great wrong to abandon it.

III.—A PRACTICAL AND TESTED METHOD.

What is here attempted is to present an actual structure which may help toward a working pattern. It is not stereotyped, but flexible in every part. The aim has been, not to make a new organization, but, recognizing the churches as already the organization, simply to adjust a method of applying their existing forces with as little machinery as possible. The name Evangelical Alliance expresses the nature of what is now being accomplished. The results of more than ten years of careful application, in different places and under various phases, warrants the writer in assuming that the work is far beyond empirical limitations. He is frequently called upon to set forth the practical method of this co-operation or alliance of churches. This description is for that purpose.

The first step is for the ministers of a town, of some ward of a city, or of some country community, to unite with a firm and consecrated purpose for active Christian work. Let each one of them select from the membership of his own church one thoroughly active, zealous, and competent person for each hundred of his membership. If there be a remaining fraction of a hundred, over fifty, let him select one more. This will give a force fairly apportioned

among the churches. These selected persons are to act as supervisors, each to have a district, and each to have a force of workers to visit in his district. Let each pastor call his own supervisors together, explain to them the work to be done, and see that they are thoroughly consecrated to the work which he shares with the other co-operating ministers. Each church may exercise whatever form of appointment may be most according to its own usages, in order that these supervisors may stand as representatives of their respective churches.

If any churches in the vicinage decline to co-operate, they must simply be dropped and the utmost kindness maintained toward them. The Roman Catholic churches and, in rare instances, some others will not enter such alliance.

A meeting of the co-operating pastors and supervisors, who together constitute the working executive, appoints a committee to secure the division of their whole territory into districts which, as nearly as practicable, shall consist of one hundred dwellings each. It will be found that, on the average, the number of supervisors thus obtained and the number of such districts will be just about equal. In large Catholic populations the districts may as well count more than one hundred houses each, because the first canvass will reveal some houses which would better be omitted in subsequent visitations. The number of dwellings in a district will not be exactly one hundred each, but this should be aimed at. The next step is the distribution of these districts among the corps of supervisors. This may be done by lot or otherwise, as agreeable and best. Each supervisor will then make a sketch of his district, dividing it into ten fields, with the aim of showing ten dwellings in each field. This done, careful record, with duplicate, being made of the same, the whole field is ready for the workers. The force of workers must come pro rata from the members of the churches. The best way is for each pastor to sit down with his own supervisors, each one of them to have a list of the church members before him, and to designate, one by one, in rotation, until each has chosen a corps of fifteen. It is necessary to make choice of a larger number than will be called into immediate service. Some that are chosen likely cannot serve. Some will be temporarily interrupted, and a reserve corps will be necessary in each church. Then will each of these supervisors notify the persons on his list to meet the pastor for a conference of explanation and consecration. If there be three supervisors, this meeting will consist of the pastor, these three, and forty-five selected persons.

The pastor should then explain that this work is not burdensome ; that each one of these forty-five visitors is to receive a list of houses lying together in some specified field, and will be asked to visit them in a friendly, social way once every month, with very much as to time, seasons, and method left optional with the visitor, only that a report be made according to the printed blank, to be returned every month. This whole service can be accomplished, if necessary, in one afternoon per month ; so the duty is not onerous.

After such meetings in the respective churches, let there be a meeting of the pastors and supervisors, where a long list of all the visitors shall be brought. The name of each, with the address, and such initial as shall designate church relationship, should be placed upon a card. Let these cards be collected according to church relations, so that there shall be the Presbyterian package, the Baptist package, the Methodist package, and so on. Let these packages be placed in separate baskets and passed around to the supervisors, first one, and then the next, and then the next, until the names have all been distributed. This gives to each supervisor his corps of workers, consisting of both men and women, carefully selected, and from all the churches, each denomination represented with the fullest fairness, and all profoundly consecrated to the gospel work of the community. This arrangement makes impossible to any one denomination an unfair advantage over the others.

Each supervisor is now ready to call together his corps of workers, assign to them, by lot or in any agreeable way, their respective fields, install them in the work of the same, and to explain to them the method of securing statistics according to the blanks which he places in their hands. These blanks are simply a list of facts desirable to be gained toward the help of unchurched families into Sunday-school and church attendance. The statistics with reference to the same should be made out each month. The visitor of course exercises discretion and option with regard to gathering the same. That the work may be thoroughly understood and done in a uniform manner, it is well that a card of suggestions should be given to the visitors. One important matter of immediate fruitfulness is that they ascertain from the families not connected with any church their denominational alliance, or their ministerial preference, and report the same, with name and address, immediately to the minister of the church preferred. The supervisors should have also a blank for the monthly summary, on which they tabulate the reports which their visitors have prepared. These reports should cover each calendar

month. It is well also to have a card of suggestions for the supervisors, for the better regulation of their work. The general secretary will tabulate, from month to month, the district reports furnished by the supervisors, and thus gain reliable statistics from the entire community.

Repeated visits for friendly conversation on church and Sunday-school relations, and the matter of Christian living, will very soon develop facts of such deep and personal interest that visitors will be attracted to the work. Children will be gathered into the various Sunday-schools, and they and other members of the households will soon commence attending church. The pastors' lists of places where they are to call, on definite errands, lengthen. Many whom circumstances keep at their homes—the sick, the aged, the poor—rejoice that some one from the churches comes to talk with them, and many tell the experience of the sad dearth of such attention, stretching to even years of life within the sound of the church bells.

Meetings for the care of the work are perhaps best arranged as follows: On one week of the month the meeting of the Executive Board, which consists of the chairman, the secretary, the treasurer, the chairman of the Finance Committee, and likely a couple more appointed from the supervisors and ministers to act with them. This meeting reviews and plans the work, and makes the programme for the supervisors' meeting, to be held on the following week, when the supervisors and pastors shall come together for mutual conference and regulation of plans. This meeting completes the preparation of the programme for the next and larger meeting of the month. Admission to this meeting is better by tickets given out to the visitors, the reserves, the supervisors, and pastors. At this meeting the general secretary makes his report of the work done the preceding month, and of such revisions in the plans as have been fixed upon, which are then fully explained. The visitors and supervisors also have opportunity for suggestions and the relation of experiences, which latter is of peculiar and blessed interest. Testimonies will be brought from many a home, that this work furnishes all the touch of gospel grace it has had, perhaps, for years. The revival spirit pervades this meeting. This general monthly meeting may be varied from time to time by an open meeting, where popular addresses may be made upon topics connected with the work.

The Finance Committee act on ways and means, and their duties are not onerous. Printing bills, some postage, and possibly some clerical work, aggregating only a moderate expense, are equal-

ized pro rata upon the churches, and raised by the supervisors in the respective churches. This expense is not burdensome, and as the interest pervades the churches by the increased attendance in Sunday-school, prayer meeting, and church service, it will be readily and cheerfully paid. With this simple machinery, so well and fairly adjusted to the working and wants of the churches, any desirable feature can easily be emphasized. The temperance work, the care of the poor, the sick, and the increase of Sunday-school attendance are easily and effectually carried forward, as may be planned by the pastors and supervisors.*

It would be too much to expect that a work so thoroughly permeating the community in the interests of practical Christianity should be attended with universal favor. Some among the most ignorant will oppose it, some among the most depraved will oppose it, the indifferent outside the churches will have some to oppose it, the indifferentism within the churches will have some to oppose it, that kind of formalism in the churches which is unevangelical will oppose it, but as the fruits will soon begin to be gathered, and as the praying people, together with the ministers, witness these fruits, they will rejoice in them and increase their interest. This is a form of work which carries its own recommendation with it. It may move slow, but it is a broad, thorough, great, and continuous revival, and a revival of work which does not disturb the general habits or the autonomy of the respective churches. Such churches as at first decline co-operation will likely soon be won to the work. Their pastors will receive their share of the preferences expressed by households for denomination, church, or minister. These are scrupulously and promptly forwarded by the visitors to the appropriate minister, and the parties are encouraged to attend the churches of their preference. So that all the churches receive the benefits, and the voice of unfavorable criticism will likely be wellnigh hushed. Yet there will be infelicities, doubtless, here and there, in the work of both visitors and supervisors, which, however, are soon lost, as faint ripples upon the sweeping tidal wave.

* While most communities have some problems which are peculiar and local, and which must receive local study and exceptional treatment, they have others of a more general character whose solution would be most helpful to all cities or towns of the same class. Let each local alliance, therefore, send the results of its own careful study and experience to the National Alliance, which, serving as a point of contact and bond of union between the branch alliances, will be able to afford to each the benefit of the experience of all.

If pastors are indifferent or over-selfish, and shrink from firm, united, and continuous engagement in the work, it will be a failure.

If in a community, say, of twenty-four thousand population, of fifteen churches, ten of them co-operating, there be three hundred visitors, each visiting a field of ten dwellings, the reports aggregating the number of three thousand calls every month made upon families, with no households omitted, and made purely in the interest of our common Christianity, the building of the homes more and more into the life of the gospel, seeking all the poor, the lame, and the halt, and, what is a great matter, gaining the reflex good of the experience and training to the three hundred workers—such a work need not repine if unappreciated by some who do not understand it.



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